# Gaiseric

**(c. 428 – c. 477)**

## BRIEFING

**Gaiseric** (c. 389 – 25 January 477), also known as **Geiseric** or **Genseric** (Latin: *Gaisericus, Geisericus*; reconstructed Vandalic: **Gaisarīx*) was king of the Vandals and Alans from 428 to 477. He ruled over a kingdom and played a key role in the decline of the Western Roman Empire during the 5th century.

The murder of Roman Emperor Valentinian III, who had betrothed his daughter to Gaiseric's son Huneric, led the Vandal king to invade Italy. The invasion culminated in his most famous exploit, the capture and plundering of Rome in June 455. Gaiseric repulsed two major attempts by both halves of the Roman Empire to reclaim North Africa, inflicting devastating defeats on the forces of Majorian in 460 and Basiliscus in 468. As a result, the Romans abandoned their campaign against the Vandals and concluded peace with Gaiseric. Gaiseric died in Carthage in 477 and was succeeded by his son, Huneric. Through his nearly fifty years of rule, Gaiseric raised a relatively inconsequential Germanic tribe to the status of a major Mediterranean power.

## PATH TO KINGSHIP

*After his father Godigisel's death in a battle against the Franks during the Crossing of the Rhine, Gaiseric became the second most powerful man among the Vandals, only answering to the newly appointed king, his half-brother Gunderic. His status as a noble of the king's family occurred before his more formal accession to the kingship. Jordanes described Gaiseric in the following manner:*

> Gaiseric...was a man of moderate height and lame in consequence of a fall from his horse. He was a man of deep thought and few words, holding luxury in disdain, furious in his anger, greedy for gain, shrewd in winning over the barbarians and skilled in sowing the seeds of dissension to arouse enmity.

Gunderic's death in 428 paved the way for Gaiseric's ascension to king of the Vandals; his rise to power was accompanied by continued hostilities against competing powers begun by his brother. He likewise sought ways of increasing the power and wealth of his people (Vandals and some Alans), who then resided in the Roman province of Hispania Baetica in southern Hispania. The Vandals had suffered greatly from attacks from the more numerous Visigothic federates, and not long after taking power, Gaiseric decided to leave Hispania to his rivals. In fact, he seems to have started building a Vandal fleet for a potential exodus even before he became king. Before he could make his move to Africa, Gaiseric was attacked by a large force of Suebi under the command of Heremigarius, who had managed to take Lusitania. However, this Suebic army was later defeated during the Battle of Mérida (428) and its leader drowned in the Guadiana River while trying to flee.

## VANDAL CONQUEST OF NORTH AFRICA

The Vandal conquest of Roman Africa, also known as the Vandal conquest of North Africa, was the conquest of Mauretania Tingitana, Mauretania Caesariensis, and Africa Proconsolaris by the migrating Vandals and Alans. The conflict lasted 13 years with a period of four years of peace, and led to the establishment of the Vandal Kingdom in 435.

**Primary sources**

Saint Augustine of Hippo, Bishop Capreolus, Honoratus Antoninus, Prosper of Aquitaine, Theodoret, and Possidius wrote contemporary accounts of the Vandal invasion. Hydatius documented the Vandals' activities in the Iberian peninsula before crossing into Africa. Life of Augustine by Possidius was written before the Vandalic seizure of Carthage in 439. Victor Vitensis's A History of the African Province Persecution, in the Times of Genseric and Huneric, the Kings of the Vandals covered the Vandalic conquest and Roman counterattacks.

**Background**

The Roman Empire had been in a state of decline by the beginning of the fourth century, and divided into two since 395. During this time, North Africa had remained relatively stable, although beginning in the third and fourth century various Nomadic Berber, mainly Gaetuli, tribes from the Sahara had executed increasing pressure on the Roman provinces in Northwest Africa, often occupying parts of it, and weakening Roman rule over the region, although the fertile heartlands had remained under stable Roman rule throughout.

Meanwhile, starting in the late third century, the Romans had come increasingly into conflicts with the migrating Vandals, and East Germanic tribes, speaking the Vandalic language. In 405 the Vandals crossed the Rhine along with various other Germanic tribes, and devastated Gaul. The Alans, Suebi, and Vandals entered the Iberian peninsula in 409. In 419 the Vandals and Alans were defeated by the allied forces of the Western Roman Empire at the Battle of the Nervasos Mountains, forcing the Vandals and Alans to abandon their territories, and their king, Gunderic, to flee to Baetica. In 422 Vandalic king Gunderic defeated the Romans in Baetica during the Vandal war, and in 425 proceeded to sack much of Hispania. In 428 Gunderic died, and was succeeded by Gaiseric, who possibly at the invitation of Bonifatius, Roman governor of the region, crossed into Africa.

The Roman provinces in North Africa were among its richest. In 429, Numidia provided a revenue of 33,600 solidi, 9,600 annonae, and 1,600 capita while Mauretania Sitifensis provided 40,000 solidi and 400 capita. The Chronica Gallica of 452 reported that walls were constructed around Carthage in 425.

**Invasion**

In May 429, the Vandals first set foot on the continent in modern day Morocco, Tingi, after crossing the Strait of Gibraltar. From there they rapidly swept east, defeating any resistance the weakened Roman army in the region could set up. Bonifatius, immediately started amassing an army to push them back (this contradicts the claim of later writer Jordanes who claimed that Bonifatius invited the Vandals).

**Battle of Calama**

The Battle of Calama was fought between the Western Roman Empire and the Vandals in the war known as the Vandal conquest of Roman Africa. The battle took place in May 430 near the city of Calama. The Roman army under command by comes Africae Bonifatius tried to stumble here the advance of the Vandals who crossed before the strait of Gibraltar under the leadership of King Geiseric.

The Vandals marched without much opposition to the area where the main cities were located, the grain barn of Africa: Africae Zeugitana. According to Possidius, bishop of Calama and eyewitness, the Vandals along the way destroy everything they encountered:

> *«Fusing with cruelty and barbarity, crossing to our provinces and territories, they destroyed everything they could through their looting, murder and all kinds of torture, arson and other innumerable and unspeakable crimes, without regard to gender or age, nor did they spare the priests and men of God, nor the ornaments or vessels of the churches and the buildings..« Posssidius, Vita S. Augustini, chapter 28*

In early 430, Bonifatius arrived in Africa to lead the war against the Vandal raiders. He put the regular field army into position supplemented with the expeditionary force of General Sigisvult who had been left behind after the civil war of 427-429. His own Gothic bucellari formed the core of this army. How large this army was is unknown, but must have been equivalent to that of Geiseric, otherwise Bonifatius would not have dared to fight. However, according to Wijnendaele, Bonifatius' army was much smaller.[5] Geiseric' force consisted of Vandals and Alans, supplemented by a Gothic tribe and warriors of different origins and amounted to 15,000-20,000 fighters.

According to Procopius, Bonifatius led the army of the Romans in the battle against the Vandals, but was defeated and forced to flee to the safety of the walls of Hippo. In the primary source material, Calama is not mentioned as the location where there was fought. However, there are strong suspicions that it was near Calama, because Possidius fled from here to Hippo as an eyewitness.

Bonifatius was overrun by Geiseric in the battle because he was a better strategist. In all his battles with the Romans, Geiserik emerged victorious, which was exceptional, as the Roman army had consistently been the dominant force until well into the fifth century. On the other hand, troops of Bonifatius, except his own bucellari, were not of the same quality as Geiserik's warriors. The Vandals were hardened in battle, while the army of the Romans was composed diverse and not used to acting as a unit. The Romans were eventually cornered and had to retreat to the fortified cities. Bonifatius entrenched himself with his bucellari in Hippo Regius which was then besieged by the Vandals. The nearby Camala was taken by the Vandals and partly destroyed.

According to Ian Hughes, the government of Ravenna must have sent urgent calls for help to Constantinople shortly afterwards, so that East Roman aid arrived in 431. The situation was critical. Boniface was besieged at Hippo and the Vandals were therefore in fact in possession of the grain barn of Western Rome, and it is very likely that the city of Rome again faced famine.

In overview, by 430 the Vandals had taken everything in Mauretania and started pushing into the region of Numidia. There, Bonifatius confronted the Vandals at the Battle of Calama, where the Vandals inflicted a severe defeat on him, after which the Vandals pushed to the boundaries of modern Algeria. The Vandals besieged Hippo Regius in May or June. Augustine died during their fourteen month siege. The Vandals would be forced to lift the siege thanks to the attack of Bonifatius, now reinforced by Eastern Roman contingents led by Aspar.

**Siege of Hippo Regius**

The siege of Hippo Regius was a siege from June 430 to August 431, carried out by the Vandals under their king Gaiseric against Roman defenders under Boniface, Count of Africa.

Boniface, freshly reconciled with imperial power in Rome, sought to oppose the advance of the Vandals in North Africa. After peace talks broke down, he confronted them militarily in the spring of 430, but was defeated. He then retreated with his federated Gothic troops to Hippo Regius, a fortified city occupying a strategic position. The city had by then already welcomed several thousand refugees from the surrounding provinces, including one of the main sources on this event, Bishop Possidius of Calama.

The siege begins in May or June 430. While the bulk of the Vandal army imposed a land and sea blockade, detachments plundered the surrounding province. After 14 months, however, Gaiseric was the one short on supplies. The Vandals lifted the siege, making the ordeal a technical Roman victory. However, Boniface quickly abandoned the city by sea to meet with reinforcements from the eastern empire; the Vandals were able to occupy the town and subsequently defeated the combined Roman forces in a set battle.

Among those who died during the siege was St. Augustine.

**The Roman Civil War of 432**

In 432 Bonifatius left for Rome where he was appointed Magister militum of the western armies, a position which he wanted to use to retake Africa, his power base for nearly a decade by that point. After leaving Africa, Bonifatius would soon die at the hand of his rival Flavius Aetius at the battle of Rimini. In 432, Aspar was yet again defeated in the region of Hippo Regius, where according to some sources Marcian, future emperor of Rome, was caught by the Vandals.

The Roman Civil War (432) was a military conflict between the Roman generals Aëtius and Bonifatius during the reign of Emperor Valentinian III. This war took place on Italian soil and was decided in the Battle of Rimini. Despite Aëtius losing the battle, the civil war ended in his favor, because Bonifatius was wounded in battle and eventually died of his injuries.

Besides the two generals, Galla Placidia was an important player as regentes. She made a not insignificant contribution to this conflict during her regency in the years 429 to 432. She was unable to prevent her two main generals from fighting each other instead of fighting the Vandals in present-day North-Africa and the Huns in Pannonia. With her decision in 432 to deprive Aetius of his command of the Roman army in favor of Boniface, she effectively created the basis for the arise of this conflict.

Boniface and Aetius were both ambitious generals who emerged in the turbulent period after the death of Emperor Honorius in 423. They became involved in a series of political and military confrontations, including Joannes (423-425) who was proclaimed emperor by the Senate against the heirs of Honorius: his wife Galla Placida with her minor son Valentinian and his cousin Theodosius II, emperor of the East Roman Empire. In 425, a civil war broke out that was won by the heirs of Honorius. After this, Aëtius, who supported John, was promoted away to the province Gallia and Boniface, a follower of Galla Placidia, ended up on a sideline.

Bonifatius disagreed the course of events as it went after the fall of John. Therefore he refused to leave his post in North Africa. Through his marriage to the Gothic Princess Pelagia, he had a private army of mainly Gothic Bucellari and the regular army in Africa, the Comitatenses, had remained loyal to him. This allowed him to be independent and to take his own course.

A new confrontation arose when a plot against Boniface was forged in 427. Bonifatius separated North-Africa from the empire. That period is known as the Civil war of 427-429. In this conflict, Boniface and the commander-in-chief of the Roman army Felix were each other's opponents. This conflict ended when Galla Placidia reconciled with Boniface. Aetius kept himself during this conflict aside until he was ranked to the rank of magister militum in 429. This was the junior rank of the two functions of comes et magister utriusque militiae, whose senior position was held by Felix, who was thus the most influential man in those years, and also a supporter of Galla Placidia.

After Bonifatius had left Ravenna in 429 to reconcile with Galla Placida, he returned to North Africa to campaign against the Vandals. They had conquered Mauretania Tingitana and Mauretania by 430 and now began to invade the Numidia region, where Bonifatius was waiting for them with his army. In the Battle of Calama, the Romans were defeated by the Vandals in early 430, after which Bonifatius withdrew to the city of Hippo Regius which was besieged from May 430. During the siege, the famous church father Augustinus died. After 14 months of siege, Bonifatius left the city to the Vandal King and withdrew to join forces with the East Roman general Aspar, who arrived from Constantinople with an army by sea. In early 432 they joined against Geiserik, but the Romans again were defeated.

Reportedly Felix began after the promotion of Aëtius, a conspiracy against him, but Aetius was Felix ahead and planned an assassination attempt. In May 430, Felix and his wife were murdered in the Ursiana Basilica in Ravenna. After Felix's death Aëtius obtained the position of senior magister militum. Nevertheless, he left Italy to return to Gaul, where he defeated an army of plundering Goths near Arles, turned around and began a campaign in the Alps against plundering Iuthungi and Bagaudae in Raetia and Noricum. According to Wijnendaele, these actions of Aetius were carried out without the approval of the imperial government in Ravenna, and his campaigns in Gaul and Noricum were the result of the unwillingness of the army or of his Huns to participate in an overseas campaign against the Vandals in Africa. Instead of this he suppressed the raids in the north from where he easily could monitor the imperial seat of Ravenna, before campaigning against the Franks.

After the execution of Felix in 430, Aetius and Bonifatius remained as the most influential generals of the empire, both fighting for the favor of Placidia. In 432, Aetius held the consulate, an honorary function, but Bonifatius was recalled to Italy in that year, warmly received by Placidia and received the rank of patrician, also an honorary function. In addition, she gave him the senior comes et magister utriusque milities (commander-in-chief) position, while Aetius was deprived of his military command. With these decisions she created an explosive situation.

Aetius, who believed his fall was now imminent, openly revolted against the imperial authority in Ravenna. He marched from Gaul against Bonifatius who stayed in Ravenna. Aëtius had brought his own army from the West that he originally intended to deploy to the Suebi in Spain, while Bonifatius had some of his troops from Africa with him, most bucellarii and the Italian fieldarmy. The two warlords competed against each other five Roman miles outside of Arminium (the current city Rimini) in 432.

When the battle was over, Bonifatius had triumphed, but he would not enjoy his victory for long. He was injured during the battle and a few months later he died of a slaughter wound.

After Bonifatius' death, his son-in-law Sebastianus took over his position as commander-in-chief and continued the battle in Italy. He tried to capture Aëtius who had retreated to one of his fortified estates in Italy after the lost battle. However, Aëtius managed to flee and sought a good get-over with the Huns in Pannonia. Here he traveled to the court of his friend, the Hun King Rua, and after acquiring a new army, he returned to Italy.

With the help of this army, Aëtius became the winning party. He reconciled himself with Galla Placidia who again offered him the title of es et magister utriusque militias (commander-in-chief). Aetius then had Sebastianus exiled from Italy, seized the properties of Bonifatius and married his widow Pelagia. Aëtius eventually had become the great victorer of this civil war an also became the most important Roman of the west. Galla Placida no longer played a meaningful role and in 437 she had to take a Seat when her son Valentinianus III became an adult. Valentinianus would turn out to be a weak emperor.

With the death of Bonifatius, a period where several generals had fought for the power of the West Roman Empire, had come to an end. This episode would not be without consequences, because it eventually cost the empire the important provinces Mauretania Tingitana, Mauretania Caesariensis, Africa and Pannonia. Aëtius remained as the only one of the 'war lords' and had thus become the actual ruler, however he chose not to become emperor himself. With this decision, he broke the monopoly of the Western imperial government on violence, paving the way for future warlords- commanders and the disintegration of the Western army in the second half of the fifth century.

**Continuation of the War**

Despite this, a sort of stalemate formed in the region, and on 11 February 435 the Vandals signed a peace treaty with the Romans at Hippo Regius, agreeing to be Foederati in return for seizing all of Mauretania Tingitana, Mauretania Caesariensis, and Numidia. The Vandals throughout the six years of war destroyed Altava (which was later rebuilt, and established as the capital of the Berber Kingdom of Altava), and devastated Tasacora, Portus Magnus, Thagaste, Sicca Veneria, Cartennae, Caesarea, Icosium, Auzia, Sitifis, Cirta, Calama, Thuburbo Majus, and Rusadir. In turn for the peace, Geiseric also had to give up Huneric, his son, to the Romans as a hostage for a short period of time.

In October 439 a new war began when the Vandals attacked Carthage without a declaration of war, and took the city without any resistance. Gaiseric selected the capture of Carthage, rather than his first year as king, as the beginning of his regnal year. The Vandals were only able to conquer 100,000 square kilometers of Roman Africa, less than one-third of its territory. The remainder was divided into autonomous areas and Berber states.

**Vandal War (439 - 442)**

The Vandal War (439–442) was a military conflict between the Western Roman Empire and the Vandals that was fought in the western Mediterranean Sea region. The main protagonists in this conflict were the Vandal king Geiseric and the commander-in-chief of the Roman army Aetius.

Little is known about the course of this war and the battles that took place. Only in broad outlines can the course of the war be reconstructed, for there is not a single complete report of the battles that happened. The little that has been written down is based on fragments of chroniclers and occasional references from poets, rhetoricians and theologians. The main source about the events are Prosper and Hydatius. Furthermore, Cassiodorus and Jordanes provide useful information.

A few years before, the Vandals led by Geiseric had crossed from Spain to North-Africa, which period is known as the Vandal conquest of Roman Africa. This conquest ended in a stalemate, because none of the parties involved achieved the final victory. Finally, in 435 a peace settlement was reached in which the Vandals distanced themselves from the Roman provinces Mauretania Tingitana, Mauretania Caesariensis and Numidia. In return, they were assigned Africa, the richest part of the Roman province Africa Proconsularis, agreeing to the status of foederati of the Romans.

After signing the peace in 435, Geiserics' ambition for more power had not disappeared. In peace he prepared for a new war. When it became clear to him that Aetius, the commander-in-chief of the Roman army, had to focus all his attention to preserve Gaul, first by defeating the Burgundy uprising in 436 and then holding his hands full at the Gothic War, Geiseric decided it was time to realize his plans.

Geiseric had defeated the Roman army in Africa twice, once in the battle of Calama against Bonifatius and twice when it was reinforced by troops from the east, so the trust must have been great with him. It is almost certain that the eastern troops had returned home with Aspar in 439. Moreover, it is not known whether the troops that Bonifatius brought to Italy in the civil war to confront Aetius were ever sent back to Africa. Consequently, it is clear that Geiserik had to deal with a weak army in Africa, but an army that could be strengthened from Italy if the war against the Goths were to be won.

In mid-October 439 Geiseric violated the peace treaty with the Romans by invading the Roman province Byzacena without a declaration of war. Carthago, the third largest city of the Romans, was taken on October 19, 439 without any struggle. As a result, part of the Mediterranean Sea Fleet fell into the hands of the Vandals. In Italy, this news caused the necessary fear, as the cities of Rome and Naples were brought into a state of defense and Sigiswult, master of soldiers, took steps to guard the shores. Aetius and his army were called from Gaul and the emperor Theodosius II was prepared to send help.

Geiseric may have been aware that preparations had been made against him in Italy, because after the conquest of Carthage he concentrated his attack on Sicily, where he besieged Panormus. He failed to conquer the city, but burned the island and possibly, although not certainly, occupied the city Lilybaeum. In the eastern part of the Roman Empire, considerable preparations were made to go to war against the Vandals. Because of this threat, Geyseric returned his fleet to Africa in 440. Prosper attributes his return to Africa to an attack on Carthage by Sebastianus (the son-in-law of Boniface), who attacked Africa from Spain. This Sebastianus may have been commissioned by Theodosius.

The Vandals continued their attack on the Romans by invading Sicily in 440, but withdrew within a year due to the arrival of an Eastern Roman fleet. This fleet, which was twice the size of the one that Belisarius had for his conquest of the Vandals, was preparing an attack on Carthage in 441. However, this attack never occurred as the Eastern Romans were forced to withdraw due to hostilities with the Huns and Sasanian Empire.

The following year Theodosius had prepared a large naval squadron sailing westward, with the aim of freeing Carthage from the Vandals. Prosper writes that the imperial fleet was commanded by three generals, Areobindus, Ansila and Germanus. This expedition arrived in Sicily in 441 after which the island was purged of Vandals. Awaiting the Imperial Fleet, Geyseric sent negotiators to talk about peace. This diplomatic consultation took a lot of time, and in the meantime an invasion of the Huns forced Theodosius to bring back his fleet. So the emperors were limited to make a detrimental peace.

Eventually, a new peace treaty was concluded in 442. The Treaty of 442 replaced the old treaty of 435 and divided Africa again between the two powers. For the Vandals it was more advantageous, the Western Roman Empire retained the provinces of Tripolitania, Mauretania sitifensis, Mauretania Caesariensis and parts of Numidia, while the Vandals were allowed to call themselves masters of the rest of that province and whole Africa Proconsularis including Byzacena.

Aetius had every interest in the West having good relations with Geiseric, in order to prevent him from having a pretext for attacks on Sicily, or Sardinia, or Italy itself. It is suspected that he managed to persuade Valentinianus to agree to the engagement between his eldest daughter Eudocia, and the son of Geyseric Hunerik. It is very likely that this arrangement was already considered at the time of the drafting of the treaty. But Hunerik was already married to the daughter of the Visigothic king Theodoric I. Nevertheless, the existing marriage to the Gothic Princess was no obstacle. A pretext to get rid of her was easy to find. The princess was accused of wanting to poison Geiseric. She was punished for this by mutilation of her face, without ears and nose she was sent back to her father. The incident produced an immortal enmity between these kings. Theoderic I soon sought a new ally by marrying another daughter to Rechiar, king of the Suebi (449).

For the Romans, the ceding of the rich province of Africa Proconsularis was a great bloodletting. The West lost its grain deliveries from Africa, but even more importantly also the tax revenues, with which it, among other things, financed its expensive army of military forces. It is not known whether the Treaty of 442 also provided for a scheme to provide Italy with grain. Nevertheless, it is assumed that these were continued. It was clearly in the interest of the new owners to send the grain surplus to the Italian markets.

After the conquest of Carthage, most landowners who were part of the Roman senatorial class were forced to leave the coasts of Africa, some sailed to Italy, others sought refuge in the east. In the other parts of his empire Geiseric does not seem to have taken such extreme measures. He thought it was enough to make the royal capital and the central province safe.

**End of the War**

A peace treaty was signed in 442, in which the Vandals acquired Africa Proconsularis, Byzacena, eastern Numidia, and western Tripolitania while the Romans retained Mauretania Caesariensis, Mauretania Sitifensis, and western Numidia. The Vandals received the most fertile regions of Roman Africa. A marriage alliance between Huneric and Eudocia, the daughter of Emperor Valentinian III, was also made. The remaining Roman land in the area was seized by the Vandals after Valentinian's death in 455. Huneric was given as a hostage to the Romans and the Vandals had to pay an annual tribute.

**Christian persecution**

The Vandals, who converted to Christianity between 406 and 421 according to Peter Heather, followed the theology of Homoiousian in contrast to the Christians of Roman Africa. The Vandals seized churches operated by Nicene Christians, including the Basilica Maiorum which housed the remains of Perpetua and Felicity, which would not be returned until the Byzantine conquest. Augustine feared that the Vandals would cause Christians to abandon the Nicene Creed. Possidius viewed the Vandal invasion as divine punishment for sins. Around 450, Quodvultdeus, the Bishop of Carthage, wrote in *Book on the promises and predictions of God* that the Vandals were the precursors to the Antichrist.

Capreolus wrote to the bishops attending the Council of Ephesus stating that the bishops from Africa would be unable to attend the council due to the Vandalic invasion. Pope Leo I reported that the Vandals raped nuns. Quodvultdeus was expelled to Campania by the Vandals in 439. The position of bishop of Carthage remained vacant for fifteen years until Gaiseric allowed Deogratias to be appointed on 24 October 454 at the request of Valentinian III.

The *Liber genealogus*, written by a follower of Donatism in 438, stated that Gaiseric was the Antichrist and his name's numerical value was 666. This text also identified Emperor Anthemius as the antichrist.

**Brief overview of the Conquest**

After defending the aforementioned Suebian attack at Mérida, Gaiseric led most of his people—possibly as many as 80,000 persons to Northern Africa in 428/429; some scholars claim that this figure represents an exaggeration and the number was probably closer to 20,000. Whatever the true numbers, there are indications that the Vandals under Gaiseric may have been invited by the Roman governor Bonifacius, who wished to use the military strength of the Vandals in his struggle against the imperial government under the Roman general, Aetius.

Crossing at the Straits of Gibraltar, Gaiseric led not only his Vandal brethren and army, but was likely accompanied by a contingent of Alans and Goths. Once there, he won many battles over the weak and divided Roman defenders and quickly overran the territory now comprising modern Morocco and northern Algeria. His Vandal army defeated the Bonifatius' army in the battle of Calama and laid siege to the city of Hippo Regius (where Augustine had recently been bishop and who died during the siege), taking it after 14 months of bitter fighting. Gaiseric and his forces then began subduing the interior of Numidia.

A peace between Gaiseric and the Roman Emperor Valentinian III was concluded in 435, and in return for recognizing Gaiseric as king of the lands he had conquered, the Vandals would desist from further attacks on Carthage, pay a tribute to the Empire, and Gaiseric's son Huneric was sent—as a hostage—to Rome. Gaiseric's treaty with the Romans also included Vandal retention of Mauretania and part of Numidia as foederati (allies under special treaty) of Rome.

Prosper of Aquitaine wrote that Gaiseric had four of his Hispano-Roman counsellors executed after they refused to convert to Arianism. He later banned all non-Arians from serving in his court in the 450s or 460s.

In a surprise move on 19 October 439, Gaiseric captured Carthage, striking a devastating blow at imperial power, taking advantage of the fact that Aetius remained preoccupied with affairs in Gaul. Classical scholar Stewart Oost observed, "Thus he undoubtedly achieved what had been his purpose since he first crossed to Africa." Historian Chris Wickham argues that Gaiseric's conquest of Carthage presaged Rome's later collapse. The Romans were caught unaware, and Gaiseric captured a large part of the western Roman navy docked in the port of Carthage. The Catholic bishop of the city, Quodvultdeus, was exiled to Naples, since Gaiseric demanded that all his close advisors follow the Arian form of Christianity. The subsequent sermons of Quodvultdeus paint a "dark picture of the Vandal plunderers."

In the wake of Gaiseric's assault on Carthage, North African bishop and historian, Victor of Vita, wrote in his Historia persecutionis Africanae provinciae sub Geiserico et Hunerico regibus Vandalorum (History of the Persecution in the Province of Africa under the Vandal Kings Gaiseric and Huneric) that the Vandal king immediately began to unrelentingly persecute adherents of the true Nicene Christian faith. According to historian Peter Heather, Victor also claimed "that 'innumerable' Nicene bishops and priests were tortured and put to death by Vandals as they sacked and pillaged Nicene churches for their treasures." Heather doubts Victor of Vita's claim of a deliberate and prompt campaign by Gaiseric to persecute Nicene Christians and instead, avows it was more likely not until after 442, when the combined attempt by Eastern and Western Rome to retake Carthage failed; only then did the Vandal king put "considered religious policies into operation." Heather likewise points out how Gaiseric's religious policies seem not to have been applied to the other Vandal provinces of Numidia and Byzacena, where the Nicene Church operated freely in two-thirds of the Vandal kingdom.

Notwithstanding the blow to the imperial coffers caused by Gaiseric's seizure of African revenue and the corresponding grain supply, the Vandal king had no intention of depriving Italy of Africa's grain, but instead wished to sell it to the emperor for profit. Meanwhile, his new status was that of Proconsularis and as such, Gaiseric made Carthage his new residence. Inheriting an already economically efficient and effective state, the tax revenues from his new lands enabled the Vandal conqueror to construct a large fleet that challenged imperial control over the Mediterranean. Gaiseric presided over a mixture of Vandals, Alans, Goths and Romans in Africa, relying on an ad-hoc administration under auspices of the imperial government to legitimize his rule. Latin literary culture even flourished in Carthage.

Gaiseric besieged Panormus (Palermo, Sicily) in 440 AD but was repulsed. Hunnic invasions into the lower Danube forced Constantinople to withdraw forces from Sicily to the benefit of Gaiseric. In a 442 treaty with Rome, the Vandals were recognized as the independent rulers of Byzacena and part of Numidia. In 455, Gaiseric seized the Balearic Islands, Sardinia, Corsica, and Malta, and his fleet soon came to control much of the western Mediterranean. During 455, the Roman emperor Valentinian III was murdered on orders of Petronius Maximus, who usurped the throne. Petronius Maximus also married Valentinian's widow, Licinia Eudoxia, and likewise wedded the imperial couple's daughter Eudocia to his own son; the latter had formerly been promised to Gaiseric's son, Huneric, which contributed a possible casus belli that was exploited by the Vandal king. Gaiseric was of the opinion that these acts voided his 442 peace treaty with Valentinian, and on 31 May, he and his men landed on Italian soil.

## SACK OF ROME 455

The **sack of Rome** in 455 was carried out by the Vandals led by their king Gaiseric.

A peace treaty between the Western Roman Empire and Vandal Kingdom included a marriage of state between the daughter of Roman Emperor Valentinian III and the son of Gaiseric. Valentinian's successor Petronius Maximus violated the treaty by marrying his son to Valentinian's daughter which led to Gaiseric declaring Rome violated their treaty and launched an invasion. Maximus did not organise a defence of Rome and was lynched by a Roman mob while trying to escape the city.

Pope Leo I convinced Gaiseric to avoid the use of violence against residents of the city. The Vandals looted Rome for two weeks, causing widespread destruction to the city, stripping it of most of its valuables, and taking some residents as slaves. Maximus' successor Avitus had little support which led to the outbreak of the Roman civil war of 456.

The Sack of Rome in 455 and the Visigothic sack of 410 shocked the Roman world and symbolized the decline and impending fall of the Western Roman Empire, marking a pivotal moment in European history.

Since its founding in 395 AD, the Western Roman Empire was in a prolonged state of decline. One of its major issues was a mass migration of Germanic and other non-Roman peoples known as the Migration Period. This led to the sack of Rome in 410 by the Germanic Visigoths under Alaric. It was the first time the city had fallen since c. 387 BCE.

A peace treaty was signed between the Romans and Vandals in 442, in which the Vandals acquired Africa Proconsularis, Byzacena, eastern Numidia, and western Tripolitania while the Romans retained Mauretania Caesariensis, Mauretania Sitifensis, and western Numidia. A marriage alliance between Huneric and Eudocia, the daughter of Emperor Valentinian III, was also made.

Petronius Maximus is alleged to have influenced Valentinian III to have Flavius Aetius killed on 21 September 454. Maximus then conspired to have Valentinian III murdered on 16 March 455, and Maximus rose to become emperor on 17 March. Maximus, in order to legitimize his rule, married Licinia Eudoxia, the widow of Valentinian III, and married Eudocia to his son Palladius. Licinia Eudoxia, however, in revenge for her husband's murder and forced marriage, conspired with the Vandals against Maximus. Gaiseric proclaimed that the broken betrothal between Huneric and Eudocia invalidated the peace treaty and exploited the situation as a casus belli to invade Rome, gathering a large force and sailing from Carthage.

Rome had ceased to be the capital of the empire by the beginning of the 4th century and a multitude of cities served as the capital of the western empire. Theodosius I is the only emperor that is definitely known to have visited Rome between 363 and 395. Valentinian III moved his court to Rome in 450 and stayed there for the remainder of his life. The population of the city had fallen from 700,000-1,000,000 at the end of the 4th century to 300,000-500,000 by 455.

Responding to the actions of Petronius Maximus, Gaiseric moved a large seaborne force from Carthage to Italy and sacked the city in a more thorough manner than even Alaric's Goths had carried out in 410. Historian Michael Kulikowski notes that unlike Alaric, who besieged Rome as an itinerant barbarian general in "desperate straits," Gaiseric was the king of a flourishing polity and was therefore able to systematically conduct the sack. More than just systematically attack Rome, Gaiseric's invasion was a devastating blow to the empire itself, so much so that the late historian Michael Grant once claimed, "Gaiseric contributed more to the collapse of the Western Roman Empire than any other single man."

Before Gaiseric marched upon Rome, Pope Leo I implored him not to destroy the ancient city or murder its inhabitants. Gaiseric agreed and the gates of Rome were thrown open to him and his men. Once inside the city, the invaders plundered it thoroughly, to the extent that Procopius noted how the Vandals had even stripped the gold from the ceiling of the Jupiter Capitolinus temple—but more significant was the capture of important figures and dignitaries in the city, whose return remained a bargaining point between the

Vandals and the Empire for many years to come. Routine Vandal raids along the coast of Italy and the Mediterranean characterized the situation during the first years after Gaiseric's successful seizure of Rome.

The Vandals landed at Ostia, located at the mouth of the Tiber only a few miles southwest of Rome. Maximus tried to flee Rome, but was spotted by an angry mob and stoned to death before being thrown into the Tiber. Before approaching, the Vandals knocked down the aqueducts that supplied water to the city. Pope Leo I was able to convince Gaiseric to spare those who did not resist, protect buildings from fire, and to not torture captives. While Gaiseric kept his promise not to burn and slaughter, he did carry off some inhabitants as slaves, and also managed to capture Eudoxia and her daughters Eudocia and Placidia as they tried to escape

Petronius Maximus, who was foremost among those vying for power in the wake of Valentinian III's murder, fled rather than fight the Vandal warlord. Although history remembers the Vandal sack of Rome as extremely brutal—making the word vandalism a term for any wantonly destructive act—in actuality, the Vandals did not wreak great destruction in the city; they did, however, take gold, silver and many other things of value. Gaiseric also took with him Empress Eudoxia and her daughters, Eudocia, and Placidia, as well as riches from the city. Across Italy, the shock of the Vandal sack of Rome and the ongoing presence of the Vandals paralyzed the imperial government. Eudocia married Gaiseric's son Huneric after arriving in Carthage. That union produced Hilderic—Gaiseric's grandson—who later played a critical role in Emperor Justinian's sixth-century conquests of north Africa.

The Vandals sacked the city for two weeks before returning to Africa, during which the imperial government of the Western Roman Empire was effectively paralysed. They marched south through Campania, devastating the region, and attempted to sack Neapolis but failed as the city had better defences. Gaiseric and his army looted great amounts of treasure from Rome. They "tore off half the roof" of the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus by stripping away the gilt bronze roof tiles, hence the modern term *vandalism*. The two-week Vandal sack of 455 is generally considered more destructive than the three-day Visigoth sack of 410. Victor of Vita records that several shiploads of slave captives arrived in Africa from Rome, who were then divided between the Vandals. Deogratias, the Bishop of Carthage, bought the freedom of some of the Romans by selling all of the valuables from his church. Deogratias hosted and fed them in larger churches in Carthage until they could be repatriated back to Rome.

Avitus, who had the military and financial support of King Theodoric II, was acclaimed emperor by his army in Arles on 9-10 July, and was later recognized by the Roman Senate. On par with this, Gaiseric and his forces would be eventually be repelled from sacking Italy at the Battle of Agrigentum in 456. He (Avitus) was later overthrown by Majorian and Ricimer after a civil war in 456. Avitus allowed the Visigoths to enter Suebian-controlled Hispania in return for Theodoric's support. Avitus was popular with the Germanic elites, but he proved to be unpopular with the Roman aristocracy and struggled to gain control of the government.

Despite the popular image of the Vandals as destroyers, the severity of the sack is debatable, with claims that it inflicted little murder, violence, or arson. This interpretation seems to stem from Prosper's claim of the promise of leniency which Pope Leo I coaxed from Gaiseric. The Byzantine historian Procopius reported the burning of a church.[*citation needed*] Some modern historians like John Henry Haaren maintain that temples, public buildings, private houses and even the emperor's palace were sacked. The Vandals also took immense quantities of gold, silver, jewels and furniture, destroyed works of art, and killed a number of citizens.

## THE VANDAL WAR OF 461 - 468

The Vandal War (461–468) was a long-term conflict between the two halves of the Roman Empire on the one hand and the Vandals in North Africa on the other. The war revolved around hegemony in the Mediterranean and the western empire. The Vandals as a rising power posed an enormous threat to the stability of the Roman Empire.[1] Piracy and plunder were scourges threatening trade throughout the Mediterranean. The Roman war effort from 466 onwards was aimed at the destruction of the Vandal Kingdom to restore the empire to its original territory.[2] Armed conflicts alternated with peace talks, and the two parts of the Roman Empire did not always act in unison.

**Prelude**

Geiseric (429–477), king of the Vandals, had played an important role since he led his people to Africa in 429. He had received that position by emerging victorious in a series of wars with the Romans. In the conflict between 461 and 468 his main opponents were: Ricimer, commander-in-chief of the Western Roman army and strongman in the west since his coup in 461, and Leo I (457–474), emperor of the eastern part of the Roman Empire, who frequently occupied himself with the western part because of the lack of a western counterpart. The eastern emperor oversaw many ambitious political and military plans, mainly aimed at aiding the faltering Western Roman Empire and recovering its former territories.

Furthermore, the Roman general Marcellinus, a fierce opponent of Recimer, played a prominent role from the start. The role of Western Roman emperor Libius Severus (461–465) was minimal, while that of his successor Anthemius (467-472), on the other hand, was considerably greater. Basiliscus at least, an Eastern Roman general, played an important role at the end of the war.

After the earlier Vandal War of 439–442, North Africa largely fell into the hands of the Vandals. They were formally as foederati of the Romans but de facto ruled that part of the empire to their own discretion. Since then, the Vandals had control of part of the Mediterranean fleet and focused on piracy, at first on a small scale but becoming more and more significant over time. The Western Roman Empire lacked sufficient resources to effectively counter this.

In 455, the Vandal king Geiseric saw the usurpation of Maximus as an open violation of his treaty with the Romans, and an opportunity to invade Rome with his fleet. The city was plundered for two weeks (Sack of Rome). According to Johannes Malalas, who wrote a chronicle a century later, Geiseric was summoned by Eudoxia, the wife of the murdered emperor Valentinian III to avenge the murder of her husband.[3][4] He captured Eudoxia and her two daughters, Eudocia and Placidia, when they tried to flee.

In 460, the Roman army under the then emperor Majorian campaigned in Spain to strengthen Roman authority. While his generals defeated the Suebi in Lusitania (modern Santarém, Portugal), preparations were made for a campaign against the Vandals. The emperor assembled a large force with which he set out from Gaul to Carthaginensis, where his fleet was moored at Portus Illicitanus (near Elche). Geiseric, fearing the Roman invasion, tried to make peace with Majorian, who rejected this.[5] Geiseric then used other means. Traitors paid by the Vandals set fire to the fleet on 13 May 460. Even before the army arrived, the fleet was destroyed. Majorian canceled the attack on the Vandals and had to disband the large army he had raised. In Arles he received messengers from Geiseric, with whom he agreed to make peace, which was probably a confirmation of the peace of 442.[a] For Majorian, the failed campaign against the Vandals was a huge setback, which put an end to his plans to restore the empire to its former glory and also undermined his position as emperor of the west.

In August 461, Majorian returned to Italy, where he was imprisoned by Ricimer, the commander-in-chief of the Roman army, and then murdered on August 7.[6] Ricimer's coup plunged the Western Roman Empire into a huge crisis. In Gaul, the Burgundian and Gothic foederati, who had gained a high degree of independence in exchange for supporting Majorian, turned away from Roman authority, while Ricimer received little support from the Roman army outside Italy. The generals Aegidius in Gaul, Nepotianus in Spain and Marcellinus in Sicily resisted and refused to follow orders from Italy.[7] The Gallic army seems to have declared Aeidius counter-emperor[8] and in Sicily Marcellinus had ambitions in that direction.

**The Skirmishes**

An interregnum of three months followed during which the title of Western emperor was not claimed. During this interregnum there was a political struggle for succession between Ricimer, the Eastern emperor Leo I, and Geiseric. Finally, Libius Severus (461-465) was put forward as emperor by Ricimer and inaugurated by the Senate in Ravenna on 19 November 461. The appointment was not recognized by the eastern part, which for the Vandals was a valid reason to break the peace treaty with the Romans. A new war with the Vandals broke out and at the end of 461, Geiseric's naval fleet captured the islands of Corsica, Sardinia, Malta and the Balearic Islands from the Romans and raided mainland Italy and Greece.

Ricimer, now the strongman in the west, was indeed lord and master in Italy, but in addition to the hostile attacks in the Mediterranean region, he had to deal with open military opposition from the generals Aegidius, Nepotianus and Marcellinus. In Marcellinus, who stayed south of Italy in Sicily, Ricimer saw a danger to his position. Ricimer turned to a ruse to get the able general out of his way. Marcellin's army consisted mainly of Hun auxiliary troops. Bribes from Ricimer induced the Huns to abandon Marcellin's service and enter his. Deprived of most of his troops, Marcellinus left for Dalmatia. However, Ricimer did not intervene militarily, because Marcellinus was supported by the Eastern Roman emperor Leo I. Nepotianus and Aetius no longer posed a danger to Ricimer after he managed to attract the Gothic and Burgundian foederati to him with generous favors.

After Marcellin's departure, Sicily was again ravaged by Vandal attacks, but Ricimer's negotiations had no effect. A peace mission under the umbrella of the Eastern Roman Emperor Leo in 462 was more successful. The ladies of the Theodosian house returned from their captivity. Eudocia, the bride of Huneric, was saved, but her mother Eudoxia and her sister Placidia were sent to Constantinople. In return, Geiseric negotiated for a certain portion of Valentinian III's property as the treasure of Eudocia. He had already occupied and annexed the Mauritanian provinces, as well as Sardinia, Corsica and the Balearic Islands, and planned to preserve the marriage of his son Huneric to Eudocia.

Geiseric's concession had a clear political purpose. The Vandal monarch now emerged as the champion of the Theodosian house against Ricimer and his upstart emperor. Placidia was married to Olybrius, a member of a prominent Roman family, and Geiseric demanded that Olybrius succeed to the throne in Italy. Threatened on the one hand by the Vandals, on the other by Marcellinus in Dalmatia, Ricimer and the obedient Senate asked for mediation from the Eastern Roman emperor. Leo was asked to bring about a reconciliation with Geiseric and Marcellinus. Leo agreed after which Marcellinus ceased hostilities. However, the envoys that Leo sent to Geiseric returned from Carthage without results. Geiseric claimed on behalf of his daughter-in-law that all her father's private property in Italy belonged to him, as well as the inheritance of Aetius, whose son Gaudentius he kept as a prisoner. In pursuit of those claims, Geiseric led a major expedition against Italy and Sicily and destroyed rural districts and undefended towns. Ricimer had little to say against that since his army and navy failed to stop the Vandals at sea.

In 463 a confusing spectacle occurred, when Ricimer, in the name of the western emperor Libius Serverus, employed Goths to attack part of the Roman army in Gaul. When the battle was fought at Orleans, Aegidius was victorious. His rebellion was not curtailed until the autumn of 465, when he was murdered. At the time, Aegidius was engaged in negotiations with the Vandal king, Geiseric and attempted to build an alternative balance of western forces to challenge Ricimer's dominance.

In 464 or 465, Marcellinus again campaigned against the Vandals. By order of Emperor Leo I, he returned to Sicily to defend the island against the Vandals, which posed a direct threat to the personal power and prestige of Ricimer, who called on Leo to persuade Marcellinus not to undertake hostilities against him.

Emperor Libius Severus, who was no more than a puppet of Ricimer, died on 15 August 465. His cause of death is unknown: both murder and natural causes are possible. The elevation of Olybrius, which would have been a restitution of the Theodosian dynasty, may have seemed a hopeful solution to some of the difficulties of the situation, but the fact that he was Geiseric's candidate and relative was a reason not to accept him. A year and eight months after the death of Libius Severus, no successor had been appointed.

**The War**

In 467, the sea attacks by the Vandals became increasingly extensive. Geiseric's warships now also appeared off the coast of the Peloponnesus and Egypt. It was feared that there would be an attack on Alexandria, which would have consequences for the grain supply of the Eastern Roman capital. The threat explains why the Eastern Roman Emperor Leo I decided end standing by. He abandoned the diplomatic path and took steps to achieve closer cooperation with the Western Roman government in Italy.

Now that not only Italy and Sicily were threatened but also the trade of the entire Mediterranean, the forces of the East had to be united with those of Italy and Dalmatia against the African enemy. Leo agreed with Ricimir that Anthemius, general in the eastern army, would become the new emperor of the west. Ricimer's support was secured by an arrangement for him to marry Anthemius's daughter.

In the spring of 467, Anthemius, accompanied by Marcellinus, arrived with an army to Italy. After his accession to the throne on 12 April 467, a large-scale campaign against the Vandals was prepared, to be undertaken by an Eastern Roman fleet with land troops under the overall command of Emperor Leo's brother-in-law, Basiliscus. Anthemius appointed Marcellinus, also to counterbalance Ricimer, as second imperial general and commander-in-chief of the Western Roman troops involved in the campaign.

The attack plan that the Romans had in mind was based on the idea of having the eastern and western armies act together and attacking the Vandals simultaneously on three fronts. The eastern army therefore had to be divided into two. A sizable fleet was assembled, reputedly consisting of 1,113 ships, to carry an army of 100,000 men. Marcellinus, was ordered to conquer Sardinia and then sail to the coast of North Africa to link up with the eastern fleet under Basiliscus. Basiliscus would then sail directly to Carthage with the joint fleet. Heraclius, another general, would gather eastern forces in Egypt, disembark at Tripolitania, and then attack by land at Carthage. Procopius estimated the cost of the expedition at 130,000 pounds of gold; Ioannes Laurentius Lydus estimated the cost at 65,000 pounds of gold and 750,000 pounds of silver.

Marcellinus recaptured Sardinia with little difficulty, Heraclius met little resistance from the Vandals in Tripolitania, and both moved to make contact with Basiliscus's forces. According to Procopius, Basiliscus's fleet dispersed the Vandal fleet near Sicily, but Basiliscus did not take advantage of the advantage and rested his troops at Cape Bon, a strategic location 60 km away from Carthage. According to historians Michael Kulikowski, Friell and Williams, Geiseric appealed for peace and proposed a five-day armistice to give themselves time to prepare in the meantime. Heather notes that the Romans favoured avoiding a naval battle, which may have been the reason Basiliscus hesitated to take on the Vandals to attack.

In the days allotted to him, Geiseric assembled a new fleet with a number of fireships and, aided by good winds, attacked the Roman fleet. The Roman fleet was defeated by the combination of the fireships, bad winds and surprise, with half of it destroyed. Basiliscus fled with the rest of the fleet to Sicily, to consolidate with Marcellin's forces; their morale and supplies might have secured a victory, but Marcellinus was murdered, possibly by order of Ricimer. Heraclius, who had not yet reached Carthage, returned to the Eastern Roman Empire by retracing the path he had taken, and Basiliscus returned to Constantinople with half his fleet.

**The Battle of Cape Bon**

The Battle of Cape Bon was an engagement during a joint military expedition of the Western and Eastern Roman Empires led by Basiliscus against the Vandal capital of Carthage in 468. The invasion of the kingdom of the Vandals was one of the largest amphibious operations in antiquity, with 1,113 ships and over 50,000 personnel.

While attempting to land near Carthage at the Cape of Mercury (Latin: *Promontorium Mercurii*; Greek: *Ἑρμαία Ἄκρα*; now Cape Bon or, in French, *Cap Bon*), the Roman fleet was thrown into disorder by a Vandal fireship attack that took advantage of favourable wind conditions. The Vandal fleet followed up on the action and sank over 100 Roman ships. Some 10,000 Roman soldiers and sailors died in the battle. The Roman expedition was now too scattered to land its troops, leading to its complete failure.

The battle is considered to have ended the Western Roman Empire's chances of survival. Without access to the resources of the former Roman province of Africa, the west could not sustain an army powerful enough to defeat its numerous enemies.

By 435, the Vandals under their king Gaiseric, had established the Vandal kingdom of Africa. In 455, Gaiseric sacked Rome, the former capital of the Western Roman Empire, and the Empress Licinia Eudoxia (widow of Emperor Valentinian III) and her daughters had been taken as hostages.

The plan was concerted between Eastern Emperor Leo, Western Emperor Anthemius, and General Marcellinus, who enjoyed independence in Illyricum. Basiliscus was ordered to sail directly to Carthage, while Marcellinus attacked and took Sardinia, and a third army, commanded by Heraclius of Edessa, landed on the Libyan coast east of Carthage, making rapid progress. It appears that the combined forces met in Sicily, whence the three fleets moved at different periods.

Procopius records that Basiliscus, brother-in-law to Emperor Leo, had been selected as general by the emperor in hope he would balance the growing influence of the Alan *Magister militum* Aspar who sought to control Leo; however, Basiliscus sought the friendship of Aspar to further his own designs on the throne, and Aspar "repeatedly urged upon Basiliscus that he should spare the Vandals and Genseric".

Ancient and modern historians provided different estimates for the number of ships and troops commanded by Basiliscus, as well as for the expenses of the expedition, although both were enormous sums. According to the text of Priscus, 100,000 ships were assembled, although modern scholars have emended this to 1100, which is closer to Cedrenus's figure of 1,113 vessels.

Peter Heather estimates a strength of 30,000 soldiers for the expedition and 50,000 total, when including sailors and the additional forces of Marcellinus and Heraclius. The figures for the money spent on this expedition ranges from the 1,300 *centaria* of gold reported by Priscus and Procopius (130,000 Roman pounds), to the 64,000 pounds of gold and 700,000 pounds of silver by John Lydus and to 65,000 of gold and 700,000 of silver by Candidus.

Sardinia and Libya were already conquered by Marcellinus and Heraclius, when Basiliscus cast anchor off Cape Bon, opposite Sicily, about forty miles from Carthage. Gaiseric asked Basiliscus to allow him five days to draw up conditions for a peace. During the negotiations, Gaiseric gathered his ships and suddenly attacked the Roman fleet. The Vandals had filled many vessels with combustible materials. During the night, these fire ships were propelled against the unguarded and unsuspecting Roman fleet. The Byzantine commanders tried to rescue some ships from destruction, but these manoeuvres were blocked by the attack of other Vandal vessels. Basiliscus fled in the heat of the battle.

One act of heroism stands forth from this naval defeat. Despite the situation, Basiliscus' lieutenant, Joannes, bravely fought the Vandal onslaught; Procopius describes him as "standing on the deck" and "turning from side to side kept killing very great numbers of the enemy". Upon seeing that his ship was about to be captured, he refused to surrender to Genso, the son of Gaiseric, instead leaped overboard in heavy armor and drowned himself. His last words were that he "would never come under the hands of dogs".

One half of the Roman fleet was burned, sunk, or captured, and the other half followed the fugitive Basiliscus. The whole expedition had failed. Heraclius effected his retreat through the desert into Tripolitania, holding the position for two years until recalled; Marcellinus retired to Sicily, where he was reached by Basiliscus; the general was, however, assassinated, perhaps at the instigation of Ricimer, by one of his own captains; and the king of the Vandals expressed his surprise and satisfaction that the Romans themselves would remove from the world his most formidable antagonists.

After returning to Constantinople, Basiliscus hid in the church of Hagia Sophia to escape the wrath of the people and the revenge of the Emperor. By the mediation of Verina, Basiliscus obtained the Imperial pardon, and was punished merely with banishment to Heraclea Sintica, in Thrace.

The treasuries of the Eastern Roman Empire were now empty. Peter Heather considers the expedition to have been the last chance to save the Western Roman Empire, which controlled only the Italian peninsula and Sicily. Without the revenue stream from the former Roman province of Africa, the west was incapable of sustaining its army.

**Aftermath and consequences**

The poor result that the Romans achieved with the large-scale operation at the end of the Vandal War must have had a major morale effect. The Roman Empire had brought all its strength to bear and had failed in its mission to destroy the Vandal Empire. According to Heather the battle considered to have ended the Western Roman Empire's chances of survival. Without access to the resources of the former Roman province of Africa, the west could not sustain an army powerful enough to defeat its numerous enemies.

Nevertheless, it took two years for Geiseric to regain enough confidence to resume his attacks on Italy. In 472, Ricimer's western regime came to terms with Geiseric, making his son's brother-in-law, Olybrius, emperor. Geiseric did not make peace with the Eastern Roman Empire until 476. He concluded a treaty with the new emperor Zeno entitled *Eternal Peace*. The treaty was fairly faithfully observed on both sides under his successors. A revolution in Carthage in 531 finally gave the Roman Empire, which then existed onlt in the East, the desired opportunity for intervention and led to the Vandal War (533–534).

Following up the Byzantine defeat, the Vandals tried to invade the Peloponnese but were driven back by the Maniots at Kenipolis with heavy losses. In retaliation, the Vandals took 500 hostages at Zakynthos, hacked them to pieces, and threw the body parts overboard on the way to Carthage.

## FINAL YEARS AND DEATH

In 474, Gaiseric made peace with the Eastern Roman Empire through a treaty negotiated by the Constantinopolitan Senator, Severus, who was acting under Zeno's authority. He gave Sicily to Odoacer in 476, in exchange for an annual tribute. After enjoying just a few short years of peace, Gaiseric died at Carthage in 477, succeeded by his son Huneric, who did not have his father's enviable reputation and Vandal authority began to diminish. Nonetheless, the peace established by Zeno between Vandal-controlled Carthage and Constantinople lasted until 530, when Justinian's conquests broke it.